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August 18, 2020

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
400 7th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Secretary Carson:

Thank you for the recent response regarding the Sycamore-Meadows Apartments in Superior Township, Michigan and clarifying the oversight procedures that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has provided to the property.

I remain highly concerned by the continued outreach we have received from members of this community. Despite previous HUD involvement in improving the property there continue to be a significant number of outstanding issues that need to be addressed. Recent tenant meetings on the property have raised ongoing concerns regarding unit upkeep and maintenance, ventilation, tenant health, and security.

Among these interrelated issues, there has been a rise in violent crime in this community, and it is vital that we address this need in coordination with local officials and HUD. These residents should feel confident that their community is safe, and it our responsibility to address these security deficiencies immediately.

The ongoing issue of air conditioning and ventilation needs to be resolved and is central to some of the concerns raised by tenants. The Washtenaw County Health Department noted that over a 5-year period, there were 5 infant mortalities at Sycamore-Meadow, 4 of which occurred during period of hot weather. The high heat experienced during the summer months forces people in these units to gather outside to remain cool.

The intersection of two issues contributes to a hostile, and sometimes violent living atmosphere, and it is crucial that HUD, management, tenants, and other stakeholders work together to explore options that adequately address these legitimate concerns to ensure the health and safety of this community.

Other persistent issues that residents continue to highlight are:

1. Visible and pervasive presence of mold in units, flooding after heavy rain, persistent leaks and general plumbing and electrical issues remaining unaddressed.
2. Missing window screens that present a safety risk to young children and tenants are less likely leave windows open for ventilation.
3. Difficulty in submitting and tracking maintenance requests.
4. Lack of accommodation for individuals with asthma, COPD, disabilities, or other medical issues, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requests.
5. Lack of locks on screen doors, particularly to ensure small children do not run out into the yard or street, especially when there are flare-ups of violence in the area.

As noted in your letter, when conducting their previous evaluation in 2018-2019 HUD staff attended numerous resident meetings to understand the breadth of issues facing the property. I request that HUD agents return to engage with residents again, including directly documenting resident complaints, and reevaluate the conditions of the property due to the persistent concerns that residents claim remain unaddressed despite previous HUD involvement.

I also request HUD staff return for further direct inspection of these properties to observe the issues that have been highlighted. When this inspection occurs, I would like to be notified so that I may accompany inspectors and HUD agents as they assess the property, interact with residents, and look to resolve these concerns. I would like to actively participate in this process to ensure that these residents' issues are heard and adequately addressed and develop substantive measures to provide continued quality housing for tenants on the Sycamore-Meadows property.

Over 2 million low- and moderate-income households rely on HUD-assisted or -insured multifamily housing. HUD has a responsibility to ensure that these families continue to be offered quality, affordable, and safe rental housing. It is crucial that HUD engages in stringent oversight of these properties to ensure they meet the needs of their residents, and it is clear that more must be done on the Sycamore-Meadows property to meet these standards. It is HUD's responsibility to attend to the urgent issues highlighted in this letter in an expeditious manner.

Thank you for your continued attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

CC: Field Office Director Michael Polsinelli, Region V, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development